rural characteristics

To the air passenger wheeling over Nuku'alofa on the descent to Fua'amotu airport some ten miles distant, there would be no doubt that the town presents a rural appearance. It would be difficult for him to remember, even if he knew, that below was a town of some 18,000 people with an average population density in excess of the Suva urban area which he had left some three hours earlier. He would see the iron roofed buildings of the administrative and commercial core, but beyond this would recognise no functional specialisation. Many of the houses, small and thatch roofed, would be hidden among the trees. More visible would be the white coral sand of the graveyards, marking the earlier boundaries of the town's component villages. Closer inspection would confirm the observation by Spillius that 98 per cent of the population live in rural conditions.[14] There is no sewerage, reticulated water serves only key government areas and over half the population live in houses made at least in part of indigenous materials, often of traditional design. Towards the margins of the town the number of thatch and composite houses increases, as also does the percentage of migrants squatting on unconfirmed titles to land, and the involvement of agriculture. The town's boundaries, like its position in the rural-urban continuum, taper off slowly and only a broad transition area is distinguishable.

Land in Tonga is occupied on titles that trace their origin to the feudal days of the primitive nobility[15] and to early attempts by the first modern king and his missionary advisors to modify tradition to more closely resemble the system of tenure acceptable in Victorian England.[16] This blending of traditional and introduced, Tongan and Western, permeates almost every facet of Tongan life. It was consciously and deliberately introduced by a far-sighted monarch in an attempt to consolidate his position within a traditional framework and it served its function of perpetuating traditional content within a modified and apparently modern or western form.[17] Thus, all land belongs to the Crown and through it to the nobles and government in the form of hereditary estates or tofi'a. These tofi'a are subsequently divided into 'api kolo or town allotments and 'api tukuhau or country allotments and all male tax payers are legally entitled to a town and country allotment, although this right cannot always be exercised. The occupier has only a life interest though it is usually inherited according to stipulated laws of succession which favour the eldest son and the widow. The town dweller in this respect is in no way different from the country dweller. He is attached to the land and the ownership and direction of this land is of family concern. Its social significance is at least equal to its economic significance. Thus, although some two-thirds of the town's household heads were without registered 'api tukuhau in 1963, only one-fifth had no access

101: Clark K-4,5 (1974) 1978 OU9 Tonga OU9

By 1956, this figure had increased to 9,200, and by 1966, to nearly 16,000 not including surrounding areas. Today, Nuku'alofa, including the adjoining settlements, contains between 25 and 30 thousand persons. This number represents approximately half of the population of Tongatapu and a quarter of the nation's total population.

Nuku'alofa is not unique in these respects as many of the same features of growth are common throughout Polynesia. However, unlike other Pacific cities, Nuku'alofa is almost totally unprepared to absorb the continuing flow of 600-1,000 new inhabitants per year. The city lacks strong local government and laws, contains inadequate water and drainage facilities, refuse collection, and sewage systems, all necessary for coping with a sizable population. In addition, there are few opportunities for steady urban employment and, therefore, many persons are underemployed semi-subsistence agricultural workers dependent upon the production of others.

In these respects, one could justifiably argue that Nuku'alofa is not an urban settlement, in the true sense, but merely an agglomeration of three agricultural villages (Kolomofo'ou, Ha'ufanga and Kolomotu'a). The merging of these three villages into one urban area resulted from the establishment of the royal seat of power and the Wesleyan church headquarters at this location, plus the fact that Nuku'alofa was Tonga's first international port. The urban center of Nuku'alofa remains highly agricultural in nature. The city has acquired few new facilities other than those usually associated with administration and trade. Three